

# The bell jar and one flew over the cuckoo's nest analysis



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

In this essay, I plan to discuss the way Plath and Kesey use insanity as a device in their novels *One Flew Over the Cuckoos Nest*, and *The Bell Jar* to rebel against society and its expectations upon the individual. Both novels have a central character, which is put into a mental institution, to be re-educated to the conformity of their society. *The Bell Jar* is set in the U. S. A. in 1953. In this period, Yale, the university Buddy Willard attended was a male only college.

Even though it is post - world war 2, it was still a time of female repression as in the fact that achievement for a woman was to have a secure family and to be a good mother and wife still outlined success. *One Flew Over the Cuckoos Nest*, is set about a decade later. Not much has changed in the ways of society. In *The Bell Jar*, we see the character of Esther go through a mental breakdown, in the form of manic depression. The novel can be divided between her being in New York and her going into treatment at the point of her suicide attempt.

It is interesting to see her progression into mental decline, as we don't directly see the process the patients in *One Flew Over The Cuckoos Nest* went through to become as they are in the ward. In ' *The Bell Jar* ', from the very beginning, it is obvious that Esther is different from the other girls on the apprenticeship in New York and isn't as worldly as them. But she is forced into their world of parties and relationships, and seems to want to fit in, for example when she tries to find the kind of alcoholic drink she likes, 1 and is afraid of making social mistakes.

She is only accepted when she receives a letter from Buddy inviting her to the Yale Senior Prom, which makes all the other girls in the Amazon Hotel believe she is now worth talking to. She doesn't have any real friends and favours the girls who seem to be doing exciting things for example when she chooses to go out 'on the town' with Doreen over going to the arranged party with Betsy.

It is obvious that socialising in this way is not good for Esther, especially in the way that she takes a bath after returning to the Amazon, I felt myself growing pure again... I guess I feel about a hot bath the way those religious people feel about holy water. I said to myself: "Doreen is dissolving, Lenny Shepherd is dissolving, Frankie is dissolving, New York is dissolving, they are all dissolving away and none of them matter anymore. I don't know them, I have never known them and I am very pure." <sup>3</sup> Even though Esther sees this harsh reality of life in the city, outside school and outside her family, she still seems to hold Hollywood fantasies in her mind.

This is evident in her views of love: "I had imagined Buddy would fall in love with me that weekend and that I wouldn't have to worry about what I was doing on any more Saturday nights the rest of the year." In a way, this is a very immature outlook. She seems to want Buddy's love, not because she loves him and wants his love in return, but to relieve her of the stress of blind dates or having nothing to do on a Saturday night. On the other hand, McMurphy, in *One Flew Over The Cuckoos Nest* *The Bell Jar* is set in the same year as the Rosenberg Execution.

This is an important fact, as it is mentioned in the first paragraph and gives the audience an idea of Esther's unhealthy fascination with death. " It had nothing to do with me, but I couldn't help wondering what it would be like, being burned alive all along your nerves. " 4 This is the first thing that is fed to the audience that clues them that Esther is not of the healthy mindset that society expects. She also feels as though she has to live up to the expectations of others all the time. During her childhood, she was always a high achiever and won many awards.